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The track system, organized to give every pupil a chance for maximum self-fulfillment, is discussed. Ability grouping is used; so it is best to be aware of it and systematize it. Special provision should be made for all educable pupils who deviate widely from the norm either as gifted or slow. The track system improves upon the ability grouping procedures it superseded. It allows for continuity; emphasis upon counseling, a chance for academic success for every pupil, better teachability in class structure, emphasis upon specialization in teacher training, curriculum development, and flexibility in pupil programing. The track system stimulates the establishment and maintenance of high academic standards. It also provides a continuous educational opportunity for those who cannot achieve at standard levels and contributes significantly to a reduction in the dropout rate. The problems of the track system are those of operation and resources rather than those of weakness in principle.

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A DEFENSE OF THE TRACK SYSTEM

Carl F. Hansen

The author is Superintendent of Schools, Public Schools of the District of Columbia. The following is taken from *Review of the Track System in the District of Columbia,* presented to the board of education on January 13, 1964.

The main purpose of the track system is to increase the teachability of classes. It is not, however, a cure-all. It does not prevent the effects of poverty; it does not take the place of other needed services. It does not supplant the need for competent teaching and administration. Care should be taken to avoid expecting more than is reasonable or blaming the track curriculum for conditions it cannot be expected to cure.

It stimulates sharper counseling. It holds the principal and his staff responsible for the most favorable placement of each pupil. It retains in the hands of the principal the authority for the programing for each pupil. It encourages the use of adjunct services such as those available from the Department of Pupil Personnel Services in determining pupil programing.

The track system is pragmatic. It recognizes that pupil placement is not a fixed or rigid process but subject to continuous review. It proposes doing the best possible with the information at hand. It is based on the premise that it is better to do the best that can be done than to do nothing at all. In this respect, it is no different from the medical profession or the business profession.

It seeks to do the best possible with the resources at hand to provide equal opportunity for every pupil through appropriately designed programs.

In brief, the track system is organized to give every pupil a chance for maximum self-fulfillment.

Experience in Washington, D. C. permits the following observations to be made.

1. Ability grouping takes place one way or another. It is better to organize, systematize, prepare for it, and to be aware of it.
2. All educable pupils must have their places in school. Special provision must be made for them, when they deviate widely from the norm either as gifted or slow.

The obligation of education is to increase the amount of difference in achievement at the same time that it increases appreciation and empathy of one individual for another. This ability grouping within the comprehensive school aims to do.

3. The track system improved upon the ability grouping procedures it superseded by providing continuity, emphasis upon counseling, completeness in organizing for the gifted from the fourth grade and for both the gifted and the slow in the senior high schools, a chance for academic success for every pupil, better teachability in class structure, emphasis upon specialization in teacher training, curriculum development, and materials, and flexibility in pupil programing.

4. The track system is not considered as a complete treatment for educational handicaps or socio-economic deprivation.

5. The track system encourages educational experimentation, special developments for work training, and activities leading to the diffusion of cultural experiences.

6. The track system has stimulated the establishment and maintenance of high academic standards. This is shown in the high scoring in the academic tracks, in the increase in the number of honors and college preparatory students, in the rising number of college admissions, and in the large number of transfers from the basic to higher tracks. In the last five years, 6,790 pupils have been

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graduated from the rigorous honors and college preparatory tracks.

7. While maintaining standards and challenging pupils to attain them, the track system provides a continuous educational opportunity for those who cannot achieve at standard levels. In the last five years 1,977 pupils have been graduated from the basic track. It is unlikely that these pupils could have done so without the track program.

8. At the senior high school level with the full application of the track system in 1958-59 the retention rate began to increase from a low of 48.2 percent of the ninth grade three years earlier. The rate increased to 63.9 percent in 1962-63, a level almost 33 percent higher than that of 1958-59. It is reasonable to conclude that the track system contributed significantly to a reduction in the drop-out rate prior to its inception.

9. The problems are those of operation and resources rather than of weakness in principle. It must be said, however, that principals, teachers, and counselors have done an exceptional job of applying the principles of the track program. Considering the precision required and the magnitude of the operation, those who appraise this phase of school management will acknowledge the general high quality of performance at the same time that they work to improve the operation.